

# Iowa

## Background

Iowa offers two state-funded pre-K programs: the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP) and the much smaller Shared Visions Program (SVP).

### Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP)

SWVPP is a part-day program for all four-year-olds.<sup>1</sup> Children must be four years old by September 15 to enroll (children younger than four may participate in SWVPP, but the state does not provide funding for those slots). If a school district does not have space available to serve all eligible students, the district creates its own enrollment priorities.<sup>2</sup>

The Iowa Department of Education administers SWVPP through a funding formula called the Preschool State Foundation Aid. Only public school districts can receive SWVPP funding, but districts may subcontract with nonpublic preschools or child care centers to offer services. Charter schools in participating school districts are eligible to serve students through SWVPP.

### Shared Visions Program (SVP)

SVP is a part-day program for at-risk three- to five-year-olds.<sup>3</sup> Students from families earning less than 130 percent of the federal poverty level must comprise at least 80 percent of an SVP classroom. Children who do not meet the income requirements but who have one or more risk factors can be served in the remaining 20 percent of SVP slots. Providers may also enroll children who do not meet the income eligibility or risk guidelines as long as those families pay for services based on a locally determined sliding fee schedule.<sup>4</sup>

The Iowa Department of Education (IDE) administers SVP as a competitive grant program. Any public school, nonprofit licensed child care center, Head Start agency, community action agency, or other public, nonprofit agency may compete for funding. As such, charter schools are eligible to compete for SVP funding.

### Charter schools in Iowa

Iowa allows start-up and conversion charter schools. Charter applicants must first seek approval from the local school board and then from the state board of education. Applicants denied by a local school board may appeal to the state board.<sup>5</sup>



TOTAL SCORE

45/50

Iowa's climate for charter schools to offer pre-K is **hospitable\***

- + There are no state statutory or regulatory barriers to charter schools accessing state funding for pre-K.
- + Compared to K-12 funding levels, pre-K program funding is sufficient to attract charters.
- + The size of the pre-K program does not limit charter access to funding.
- The funding, application, or approval process creates a barrier to charter access.
- + Automatic enrollment from charter pre-K to kindergarten is not prohibited in legislation or practice.

*\*Iowa's score is based on its Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP), rather than the Shared Visions Program (SVP), because the former is the larger program in the state.*



## Process for Accessing Pre-K Funds

Currently, SWVPP districts are funded through a funding formula based on the preschool count (in the program's first four years, school districts applied for funding through a competitive grant process). Nonparticipating districts interested in offering SWVPP have had the opportunity to apply every year for the past four years.<sup>6</sup> Districts that receive SWVPP funding can contract out pre-K services to qualified community partners.<sup>7</sup> Charter schools in participating districts are eligible to receive SWVPP funding directly through the school funding formula.

Providers interested in offering SVP, including charter schools, must compete in the annual grant application process. Grants are awarded for one year with a renewal option for up to five years. Existing providers apply for renewal grants as part of the annual application cycle. All providers must be accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) by the end of the second year of their grant, or they will not be funded.<sup>8</sup>

## Barriers

There are two state funding streams for pre-K in Iowa; the barriers focus on both SWVPP and SVP because charters can access funding through both programs.

### Are there any statutory or regulatory barriers to charter schools accessing state funding for pre-K?

**+** **No.** The state charter law, SVP legislation, and SWVPP legislation do not explicitly allow or prohibit charter schools from offering pre-K. Iowa's sole charter elementary school, Prescott Elementary School, offers pre-K.<sup>9</sup> Prescott receives funding from both SVP and SWVPP.

### Is the funding level of the state pre-K program a barrier to charter access?

**+** **SWVPP: No.** The funding level is not a barrier to charters offering pre-K in Iowa. Charter schools that offer half-day SWVPP services receive half of the per-pupil funding amount that charters receive to serve full-day K-12 students.

**-** **SVP: Yes.** Low pre-K program funding, compared to K-12 funding levels, makes pre-K less attractive to charters. Providers receive a flat grant amount for offering SVP that varies

widely, based on the number of participants served and the types of comprehensive services that the grantee will provide.

### Is the size of the state pre-K program a barrier to charter access?

**+** **SWVPP: No.** The size of the pre-K program is not a barrier to charters accessing SWVPP funding. The program serves more than half of all four-year-olds in the state.

**-** **SVP: Yes.** The small size of the pre-K program limits charter access to SVP funding. The program serves only 3 percent of all four-year-olds in the state.

### Is the application, approval, and/or funding process a barrier to charter access?

**-** **SWVPP: Yes.** Only charter schools in participating districts can receive SWVPP funding.

**+** **SVP: No.** Charters interested in offering SVP apply, are approved, and receive funding under the same process as other providers.

### Is automatic enrollment from pre-K to kindergarten prohibited in legislation or practice?

**+** **No.** Charter schools that offer pre-K can automatically enroll pre-K students into their kindergarten program.<sup>10</sup>

### Are there other barriers to charter schools accessing state funding for pre-K?

**-** **Yes.** Iowa has the nation's third-weakest charter school law. The state offers only one authorizing option—local school districts—and charter schools have limited operational, fiscal, and legal autonomy. As a result, there are relatively few charter schools in Iowa, which limits the degree to which charter schools are able to serve as pre-K providers in Iowa.

## Recommendations

To address the barriers to charter access, the state should:

- Strengthen its charter law to open the state to additional charter schools.
- Explicitly allow charter schools to offer pre-K in the state charter school law.
- Explicitly allow charter schools located outside of SWVPP districts to apply for SWVPP funding.



	Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP)	Shared Visions Program (SVP)	Charter schools in Iowa
Year created	Launched in 2007 <sup>11</sup>	Launched in 1989	Charter law enacted in 1996 <sup>12</sup>
Children in state	81,073 three- and four-year-olds in Iowa <sup>13</sup>		604,442 school-age children in Iowa <sup>14</sup>
Children served	24,926 children served 2 percent of three-year-olds 57 percent of four-year-olds <sup>15</sup>	1,726 children served 2 percent of three-year-olds 3 percent of four-year-olds	315 students served .05 percent of school-age population Three charter schools <sup>16</sup>
Charters offering pre-K	One charter school in Iowa offers pre-K. <sup>17</sup>		One charter school offers an elementary program. <sup>18</sup>
Funding	Districts receive \$3,183 per pupil to offer SWVPP.	Providers receive a flat grant to offer SVP. Grants range from \$43,436 to \$171,845. <sup>19</sup>	Charter schools receive \$6,366 per pupil to serve K–12 students.

## Endnotes

1 Providers are required to offer at least ten program hours per week.

2 Iowa Department of Education (IDE), “Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program for Four-Year-Olds: Frequently Asked Questions,” 2014–2015, [https://www.educateiowa.gov/sites/files/ed/documents/FAQ%20for%20implementation%202014-2015%20\\_0.pdf](https://www.educateiowa.gov/sites/files/ed/documents/FAQ%20for%20implementation%202014-2015%20_0.pdf).

3 Like SWVPP, providers are also required to offer at least ten program hours per week.

4 IDE, “FY16 Shared Visions Preschool Application: Frequently Asked Questions,” <https://www.educateiowa.gov/sites/files/ed/documents/FAQ%20for%20Implementation%20-%20Shared%20Visions%20Preschool.pdf>.

5 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS), “Measuring Up: Iowa,” <http://www.publiccharters.org/get-the-facts/law-database/states/IA/>.

6 IDE, “Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program for Four-Year-Olds: 2013–2014 Preliminary Report,” <https://www.educateiowa.gov/sites/files/ed/documents/2013-2014SWVPPPrePreliminaryReport.pdf>.

7 Ibid.

8 IDE, “FY16 Shared Visions Preschool Application: Frequently Asked Questions.”

9 Prescott Elementary School website, <http://www.prescott.dbqschools.org/school/charterschool.html>.

10 Interview with IDE Education Consultant, December 3, 2014.

11 W. Steven Barnett et al., “The State of Preschool 2013: State Preschool Yearbook” (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2013), <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/yearbook2013.pdf>.

12 NAPCS, “Measuring Up: Iowa.”

13 State population data calculated using ACS 2012 five-year estimates; U.S. Census Bureau, “American Community Survey,” [www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs).

14 Ibid., all children in households, three to seventeen years old.

15 W. Steven Barnett et al., “The State of Preschool 2013.”

16 NAPCS, “Measuring Up: Iowa.”

17 IDE, charter schools search page, <https://www.educateiowa.gov/pk-12/options-educational-choice/charter-schools>; IDE lists Prescott Elementary School as serving grades K–5, but the school’s website confirms that it offers pre-K.

18 Ibid.

19 Interview with IDE Education Consultant, December 3, 2014.